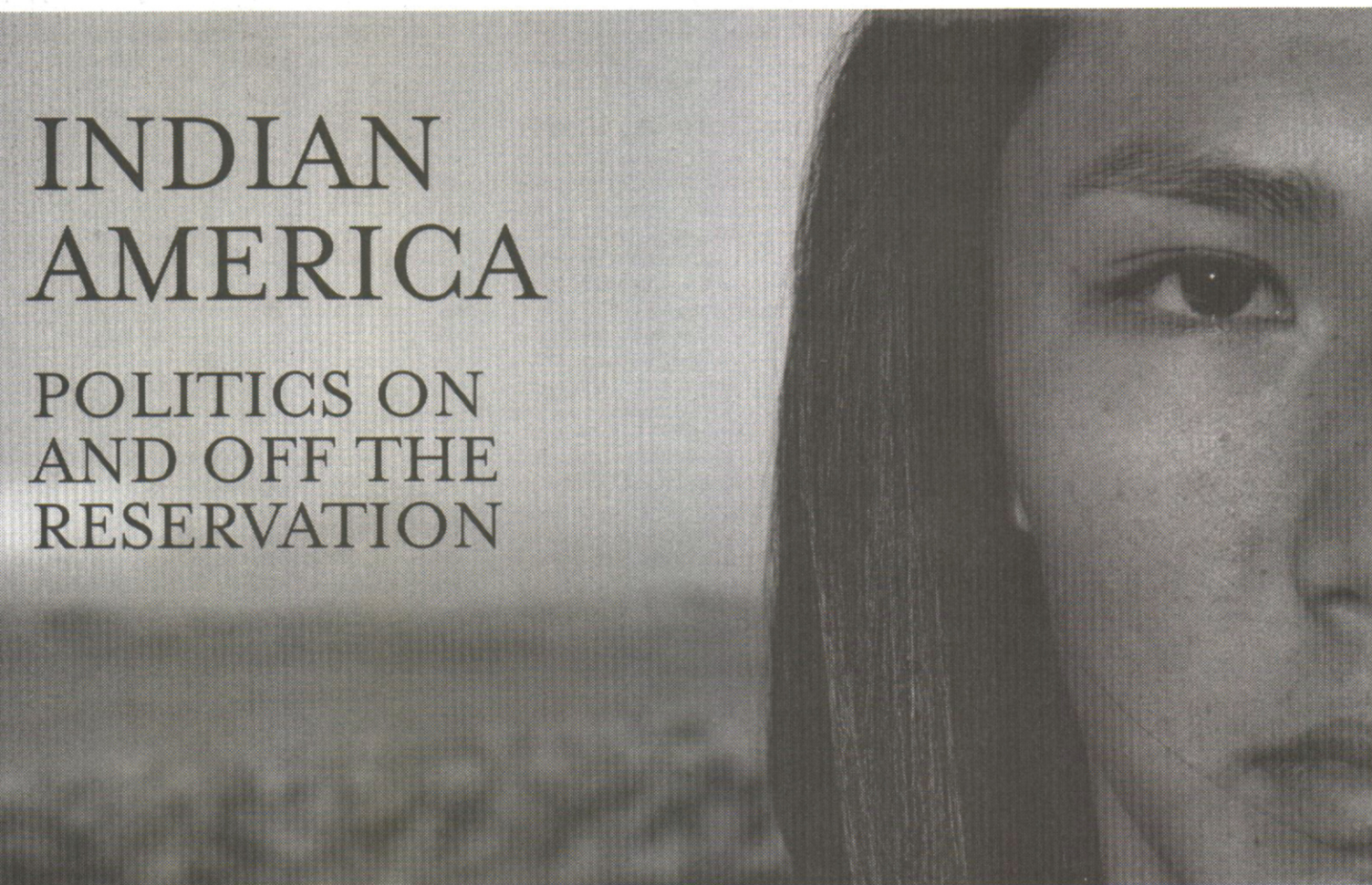


PAUL KRASSNER ON *STEAL THIS MOVIE* • COLOMBIAN QUAGMIRE

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

October 2, 2000



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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

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Letters

Get a Grip

I don't mean to belittle Hope Nemiroff's experience with breast cancer and the discovery of DDT in green tea, but I find the obsession of some Americans with tiny bits of pollution exhausting ("What's in Your Green Tea?" August 21).

I am fanatical about eating organic produce and free-range animals because of the dangers of pesticides to field workers. But hey, I'm 55 years old, cancer runs in my mother's family, and I grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm where DDT was routinely used.

It was the sidebar on Malaria, which is weakening and killing so many in the world, that deserved cover story treatment.

Kate Bradley
Summanish, Washington

Even More Gore vs. Nader

Although I am leaning toward a vote for Nader, I wanted to praise James Weinstein on making an insightful and original case against voting for Nader. ("Dialogue," August 21).

Robert McChesney's main point is that a strong Nader showing at the polls will have the effect of steering the Democrats left, or at least in preventing them from becoming increasingly conservative. A corollary is that a strong Nader showing will bring current "left" issues and opinions into focus, and that the stringency of debate of the two parties will be loosened.

Weinstein makes a powerful case that these goals could be accomplished much more effectively if Nader ran in the Democratic primaries, giving himself more media exposure and forums for debate. It appears to me that every one of McChesney's strongest arguments in his case for Nader can be replied to with the question: "Then why didn't he run in the primaries on the Democratic ticket?"

This certainly isn't an argument against the vote for Nader, but simply a very insightful point that Weinstein has made regarding the Nader strategy in assessing means and ends. If McChesney is correct in assessing the true ends of Nader's candidacy, then Weinstein is also correct in arguing that Nader has perhaps not chosen the most effective means. (A McChesney response ought to be interesting.)

Barry Lam
Irvine, California

The debate between Robert McChesney and James Weinstein was as good as such debates get, if you ignore the fact that the very same debate has been taking place in the pages of *In These Times* since it was founded in 1976. Except for a few name changes, you have the

same arguments. Just wait for 2004. It will be déjà vu all over again.

I have always been a passionate lesser-evil backer in the past. Then something happened to me on my way through the Clinton years. I quit believing in what I was arguing. I don't think my experience is unique on the left. Weinstein and his allies have lost the ability to make people believe that voting for Al Gore is anything more than just rubber stamping the status quo.

That is a problem. That is a very big problem. The task of supporting Nader is light as a feather, compared to the task of supporting Gore. I do not envy Weinstein in his labors.

Randy Cunningham
Cleveland

Weinstein makes telling points in noting the left's history of backing third party efforts and the manifest tactical benefit of contesting nominations in the Democratic Party. Yet I don't think Nader is head without a body politic. As Seattle indicates, a considerable body of a progressive movement is in formation. Given that and the fact that, as McChesney notes, Nader does break through the media blockade, we have reason to believe Nader's candidacy can facilitate the growth of this movement.

Randy Baker
Seattle

For more on this debate from *In These Times* readers, visit www.inthesetimes.com.

Here, Here

There is a certain kind of guy who basically has no real control over his life. The only time he can express himself is to cancel a magazine subscription. You see, he doesn't have to go face-to-face with anybody to do that and it sort of compensates for the rest of his gutless life. All I can say is good riddance to any subscriber who dumps a magazine because he disagrees with one article. Disagree if you must, but don't tuck your tail between your legs and run away.

Ross Murray
Boonville, California

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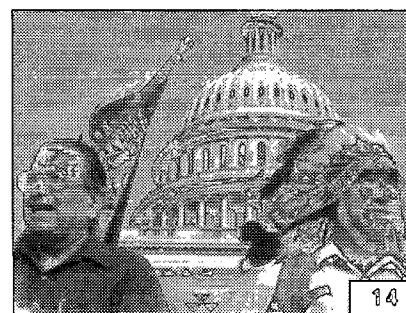
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Cover photo: Rachel Pfotenbauer/Impact Visuals

They Have A Dream

By Salim Muwakkil

Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Al Sharpton have joined forces in trying to infuse some spirit into the moribund civil rights movement. As leaders of that movement's second generation, the two men have seen many changes since the days when black protesters forced America to address the lingering legacy of our racist heritage. But the success of those protests in opening doors of opportunity largely accounts for the lack of activism that many now bemoan.

Yet there are two issues that still provoke anger and generate protest: racial profiling and police brutality. These served as the theme for the "Redeem the Dream" march that the two men organized in Washington in August. Hoping for a symbolic boost to jump-start the movement's revival, the march took place on the 37th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, when Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech.

At the event, which drew an estimated 100,000 people, King called for President Clinton to issue an executive order outlawing racial profiling. "The day my father dreamed about has not yet been realized in our lending institutions, nor in our employment offices, nor even in our nation's courtrooms," King told the crowd. "We will be satisfied when African-Americans are no longer deemed guilty until proven innocent."

Two years ago, King was selected as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the same organization led by his father during the height of the struggle for civil rights. But various improvements in the racial landscape apparently have convinced many African-Americans that organizations like the SCLC may no longer be necessary. Support for the group is tepid. The 42-year-old son of a legend seeks to change the perception of the group's growing irrelevance and remind African-Americans that social protest remains a crucial element of black progress.

There is no better exemplar of that protest dynamic than his partner, the Rev. Al Sharpton. When New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani tried to play down the police killing of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean immigrant who died in a hail of 41 bullets in February 1999, Sharpton skillfully organized a huge protest campaign that made the Diallo killing an international issue. From his shrill beginnings as a rabble-rousing child evangelist and a deceptive champion of hoaxer Tawana Brawley, Sharpton has matured into a wily activist and politician. He has made two credible runs for the state Senate and one for mayor of New York City.

In the process he has gained considerable respect from mainstream leadership. Sharpton also has converted many of his black critics who once dismissed him (with his flowing mane) as just another self-promoting preacher, long on rhetoric but short on dedication. Some of them now rank among his staunchest supporters.

Sharpton created the National Action Network in 1991, but concentrated most of his energy on issues in the New York metropolitan area. Lately he has been trying to extend his influence, showing up in cities around the country, helping to organize protests against police brutality and other discriminatory practices. Last year, for example, he organized a very successful demonstration in St. Louis to protest Missouri's failure to hire minorities for work on highway maintenance. He has been so successful, the National Action Network now has chapters in 45 cities.

It's easy to criticize civil rights marches for attempting to apply old-school techniques to contemporary realities, but such events remain useful. They

King and Sharpton remind African-Americans that social protest remains a crucial element of black progress.

help mobilize and organize social dissent, and they bring attention to issues the corporate media would rather ignore. The issues of police brutality and racial profiling may have disappeared from the headlines, but they remain critically important to many in the African-American community. The unique union of northerner Sharpton and southerner King is one significant response to that crisis. ■

Terry LaBan



The August elections further contributed to the death toll. Two days after Salazar's victory, Zapatista supporters clashed violently with PRI members in the remote area of Ocosingo. The two groups came to blows with sticks and fired shots at one another, reported Chiapas Attorney General Eduardo Montoya Lievano, leaving 37 people hurt and four dead when the incident was over. The clash may have been part of a vendetta that began long before the elections, however, and may be linked to the kidnapping of a pro-Zapatista leader from the rural town of Lacandon by PRI supporters in July. Like Ocosingo, many communities in Chiapas are comprised largely of indigenous

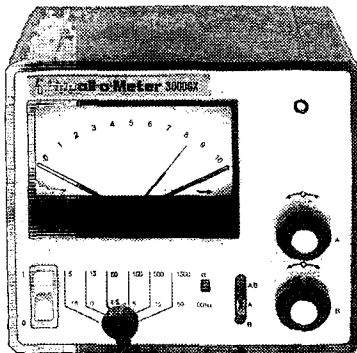
Mayans who have split their support between the PRI and the Zapatistas.

In the wake of Fox's victory, supporters of the PRI have also clashed, sometimes violently, with members of other parties near the capital. Ten people were killed in a street clash between rival PRI factions in a suburb of Mexico City. However, most of Mexico has remained peaceful despite the predictions of pro-PRI commentators that an opposition victory in the elections would result in widespread panic, violence and upheaval.

During an August visit to Washington, Fox characterized the mood in Mexico as euphoric and spelled out his agenda clearly. Besides fighting for more open immigration policies and a better stake for Mexico in NAFTA, Fox said Chiapas remains

one of his top priorities. He told reporters that he stands by his promise to pull the army back to positions it held before the Chiapas conflict began, if the Zapatistas are willing to negotiate. In the past, Fox has also voiced his support for the San Andreas Accords, which would grant limited autonomy to some indigenous regions in the state.

Political analysts like Lorenzo Meyer of El Colegio de Mexico have predicted that the PRI will quickly unravel after it loses control of the presidency in December. However, recent weeks have showed the PRI, wounded by its electoral losses, will not disappear altogether without violent convulsions initiated by those reluctant to loosen their grip on power. Given its history, Chiapas may be the stage for more of this political endgame. ■



Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

Guns on Wheels 7.3

Afraid that a recent gun buy-back conducted by the local police department had left residents of Knoxville, Tennessee dangerously under-armed, a local used car dealer recently held a "Second Amendment Saturday" promotion: Buy a car, get a free rifle. Greg "Lumpy" Lambert told Reuters that the day went well. He attracted several hundred gun lovers to the lot, sold three cars and gave out 15 to 20 squirt guns to children who stopped by with their parents. (Never hurts to start them young.) Lambert said he isn't planning to make the event an annual one, but that he is "thinking about giving away Godiva chocolates and teddy bears on Valentine's Day." No word on whether or not the bears will be packing heat.

Loose Lips 6.8

The Republican Party seems to be having a problem with some of its leading lights: They keep opening their mouths. George W. Bush's speeches have become virtual feasts of malapropism. Denouncing Al Gore's "class warfare,"

Bush tried in one recent speech to explain to his fans that he supported Americans of all classes—not just "the entrepreneurs and the farmers and the entrepreneurs." In another, he defined his concept of leadership: "A leadership is someone who brings people together."

Meanwhile, House Majority Leader Dick Armey apparently has decided that the best way to deal with jokes about his famously suggestive name is to turn these jokes into anti-gay slurs aimed at his colleagues. At a recent cocktail party, the *Washington Post* reports, humorist Dave Barry asked the house leader if he was really Dick Armey. Armey shot back with: "Yes, I am Dick Armey. And if there is a dick army, Barney Frank would want to join up."

A spokeswoman for Armey told the *Post* that the congressman was simply tired of people making jokes about his name. Of course, Armey hasn't always been opposed to making jokes out of other people's names: In 1995, you may recall, he got into some hot water after calling Frank, the Democrat from Massachusetts, "Barney Fag."

On Duty 6.4

Foot-in-mouth disease seems to have affected the party's dimmer lights as

well. In Tampa, Florida, a Republican candidate for state Senate has raised hackles with a nasty yet oddly pretentious letter he sent to local representatives of the National Organization for Women. "You

are in claim and deed, a hateful, bigoted organization of neurotics, bent on the destruction of all that is peaceful and living," David Weeks wrote. "It is my duty and conscience to destroy you and all you, heretofore, represent."

Asked to explain his comments by a reporter for the *Tampa Tribune*, Weeks chose to stay on message, as they like to



say in the political world, noting that he felt it was his "duty, my obligation, my conscience, to destroy ... gay privilege, abortion, the hateful abuse of men ... the supposed liberation of women—everything they're for."

Communication Breakdown

I spent much of the last day of the Democratic Convention meandering through the “convergence center”—a dilapidated four-story building where many of the demonstrators congregated and participated in nonviolence training.

There, I spoke with Kelly and Hillary, two activists who had been responsible for training demonstrators with trust-building exercises. They said that the most effective action of the week was the march on the police station housing the Ramparts Division—now notorious for officers accused of stealing drugs, planting evidence and shooting unarmed suspects.

In a protest orchestrated by *Catholic Worker*, several hundred people marched to the station carrying crosses—each bearing the name of someone killed or falsely imprisoned by the police. Kelly described this march as “dignified”—it reminded him of civil rights marches in the South. Hillary felt that this was one of the few times during convention week that bystanders clearly understood what the march was about and thus sympathized with the demonstrators.

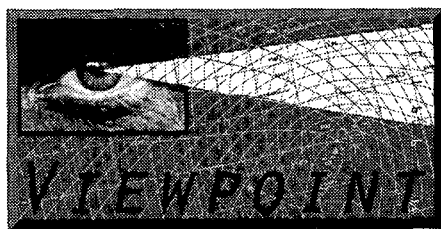
But Hillary was visibly tired and disappointed with the protests in general. When I asked her why she felt that they hadn’t been successful, she put her hand on her heart and began to cry. “We didn’t create a dialogue!” she exclaimed, in between sobs. “We made a lot of noise, but nobody heard us.”

I had to agree. The convention delegates didn’t understand what the protests were about and never made much of an effort to find out. The shadow conventioners seemed satisfied to rant about the excesses of the system and the shortcomings of the Dems; but they didn’t create a dialogue (in fact, most of the sessions I attended were in “celebrity lecture” format). For their part, the demonstrators seemed satisfied with shouting about their favorite issues—a bewildering panoply of causes ranging from “end globalization” to “free Mumia” and “stamp out Lyme disease.”

None of the various factions actually sat down and talked to each other. At the end of the convention, we were left

with a perplexing question: How do we create a real dialogue on the left?

For now, Al Gore seems to be making conciliatory gestures to the left. Witness the emphasis in his acceptance speech on fighting for “working families” and his promise to fight large corporations:



For better health care, he will fight HMOs. For lower cost prescription drugs, he will fight pharmaceuticals. For cleaner water, he will fight polluters—and so forth. Sounds good, anyway.

Yet whenever the subject of the left came up at the convention, I heard folks say: “The left is not strong enough to carry the party by itself, so we had to move to the center. The Clinton strategy works.”

Maybe it’s my innate unwillingness to accept the conventional wisdom, but I

question the assumption that the left is not big enough to carry the party by itself. I’ve seen several recent polls that seem to indicate otherwise: One says that more than 65 percent of Americans think that abortion is a private family issue (and ultimately a matter of choice); the other poll says that 79 percent believe that we face a dire environmental situation. Now these two issues don’t come close to defining the issues of the left, but they are important. So it’s worth considering that maybe we have underestimated the size of our constituency. Maybe the contemporary left is bigger than we think.

If that is so, how can we explain how little impact the left has had recently?

Maybe the left’s lack of impact is due to our failure to communicate, our failure to establish a dialogue. We seem much more interested in lecturing than we do in listening. During the only Q&A session I

witnessed at the Shadow Convention, most of the “questioners” made statements rather than asked questions.

Maybe the lack of impact is not a function of size, but our inability to raise money. In the current climate, he who raises the most money in a campaign usually wins. At the convention, the only group more omnipresent—and disliked—than the LAPD was the corporate lobbyists. Though delegates expressed disgust with the overwhelming presence of corporate money, the consensus is that the Democrats can’t win without it. But what’s stopping the left from raising its own money? Environmental campaigns, such as those to save wild rivers, certainly indicate that it’s capable of doing so.

Or maybe the lack of impact is not a function of size, but of our lack of organization. We on the left seem to revel in our pluralism. Witness the amazing number of causes on parade during the protests in L.A. (“Make the minimum wage a living wage,” “Don’t wear fur,” “Sanction same-

We need to challenge the wisdom that the Democratic Party cannot win by relying on the left.

sex marriages”). Pluralism is a strength but also a weakness. It confuses those outside the left, who fail to understand what we stand for. And as a result, the media tend to marginalize us. (The left is most successful in times of crisis, where we unite to fight a common enemy, where we focus our energy.)

What’s clear is that we need to challenge the prevailing wisdom that the Democratic Party cannot win by relying solely on the left. We do have the numbers. If we focus our energy and get our act together, we can raise the amount of money needed to wage winning campaigns on both the national and local levels.

We hold a winning hand. Now we need to figure out how to play it. ■

Bob Burnett is a longtime activist in the Bay Area and a founder of Cisco Systems.

The Media Muddle the Message

Reporting on the Democratic National Convention and the protests that accompanied it, the *Washington Post* declared: "Smothered by police, straggling through smog and heat, the protest movement that exploded late last year on the rainy streets of Seattle fizzled out here last week." The *Post*'s writers droned on that the activists' thinking was foggy: "The sheer diversity of protest issues on display muddled the movement's message."

Let's see: Several thousand activists converge on the Democrats' convention, where private bankrolling of the party that claims to stand up to the powerful on behalf of the weak is at its most obvious and intense. To kick things off, protesters unfurl a banner directly across from the convention center: a U.S. flag with corporate logos instead of stars, and the words "Soldout USA." Pretty muddled stuff.

On the Santa Monica pier, people from Global Exchange and their allies, poked "for sale" signs into the sand around a DNC booze-up funded by defense contractor Raytheon and tobacco felon Philip Morris. (So much for the PR that the Dems would touch no cash from the cancer lobby.) The D2K Coalition, which organized the biggest protests in L.A., joined striking workers outside a Loews Hotel, where low-wage employees are in a bitter battle with a CEO who is a major contributor to Gore.

It takes a concerted effort to muddle a message as plain as this. As the week progressed, one demonstration after another condemned corporate dominance over civic life, from the overpaying of politicians and the underpaying of workers, to sweatshops, pollution and the funding of for-profit prisons instead of public schools.

Conservative media, including the *Post*, rarely permit progressives to air their views in full. Like television broadcasters, reluctant to cover activism at all, they tend to cover protesters as they would wildlife: Activists appear as strange-looking creatures whose natural habitat is a dusty street, their language a staccato string of slogans, chanted or yelled,

accompanied by a fist clenched in the air. Prevented from uttering full sentences, their views are criticized as simplistic or unclear. Indeed, the very same folks who complained that the L.A. protesters muddled their message, resolutely ignored the substance of what they had to say.



After all, L.A. activists did not just carry placards, they ran a veritable message machine. As in Philadelphia, the Independent Media Center (IMC) packaged "message" in every medium: radio, video and print. Genuinely curious reporters could have taken their pick. In a new development, grassroots camcorder activists from groups like the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in L.A. or Families Against Three Strikes collaborated with experienced mavericks from Paper Tiger/Deep Dish and FreeSpeech TV to produce two daily live television broadcasts that reached a potential audience of 21 million homes via satellite, public access cable and the Web. I suspect the corporate press just couldn't make sense of it: lots of non-white, non-old, non-clichéd Americans, speaking for themselves.

Some people in power were paying attention. On August 14, police responded to an alleged anarchist bomb threat by barring access to the IMC's satellite truck just long enough for the on-air time-slot to elapse. A member of the sheriff's department even quipped that the "threat would evaporate as soon as the satellite time elapsed." And it did.

Later, the LAPD begged the IMC to remove the announcement they had had posted in place of programming during the shut-down, which explained that LAPD intervention had stopped

the broadcast. Thousands of calls were apparently coming into their office, and callers had jammed up their lines. The *Post* ignored that story.

Some reporters I spoke to seemed genuinely frustrated. Excited to be assigned to the demonstration "beat," they found their editors would only run stories about arrests and conflict, not the protesters' point of view.

The one street event that got full coverage was the police riot outside the DNC site on August 14. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that police fired indiscriminately on a peaceful crowd for more than an hour that night. Unleashing a torrent of rubber bullets, batons and pepper spray on retreating protesters and the press may have looked like an odd way for the scandal-ridden LAPD to re-assert its competence, but it actually accomplished two things: It ensured that activists and party faithful would never meet, and it established "violence" as the media's trope of the week.

The corporate press couldn't make sense of Americans speaking for themselves.

The big news in Los Angeles should have been the relative lack of violence, given the out-of-control nature of the real black bloc—the uniformed LAPD and their undercover "scouts" who infiltrated the protesters' ranks. Far from smothered by police, skilled organizers used every tool in their nonviolence handbook to minimize conflict in an incendiary situation. "It's frustrating," one high school organizer told me late one night, as police circled the activists' convergence center, eventually arresting two stragglers for jaywalking. "All the trouble they cause distracts from the issues."

Fizzled out? I don't think so. I'd say a battle was joined. ■

Laura Flanders was the host of "Crashing The Party," the nightly broadcast of the IMC.



Demonstrators in Bogotá burn the U.S. flag to protest President Bill Clinton's visit in August.

fumigation of drug crops. Clinton's waiver has achieved that priority.

Most Colombians do not buy Clinton's "counternarcotics" objective. They believe the United States has embarked on a long-term strategy to defeat the guerrillas and impose a "Pax Americana" along the lines of the 10 years of U.S.-supported carnage in El Salvador. Today in Putumayo, a major coca-growing area in southern Colombia, U.S. special forces are training Colombian troops who will soon spearhead an offensive to drive the FARC guerrillas out of their southern stronghold and make the coca fields safe for aerial fumigation. Two hundred thousand peasant farmers and coca pickers also live in Putumayo. They will be caught in the crossfire. The guerrillas are arming the farmers to defend themselves from anticipated attacks by a local paramilitary force, 800 strong, which competes with the FARC for control of the drug crops. The paramilitaries, whose luxurious headquarters are located in a villa a five-minute drive from the local army base, are reportedly paying farmers to inform on those planning resistance. Putumayo is gearing up for civil war. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has alerted Ecuador, which shares a border with the region, to prepare to receive 30,000 to 40,000 refugees when the fighting and the assassinations begin.

Clinton's visit put the presidential seal on "Plan Colombia," which mixes the incompatible aims of counter-

insurgency warfare and economic development. Conceived by the Colombian government to raise funds from drug-consuming countries for alternative development, Plan Colombia was then co-opted by the White House and State Department. The redrafted "made-in-the-U.S.A." version has provided the rationale for military aid and permitted the United States to enter the war on the FARC under the cover of the war on drugs.

The plan has been less successful in its second objective: to gain international backing and financial support for U.S.-Colombian policy. The international community is unenthusiastic about investing in development schemes that one European diplomat recently described as "cleaning up the mess that Americans will make." Among EU members, only Spain and Britain are on board, and in the Western hemisphere, only Argentina's support can be counted on. Colombia's Andean neighbors are scared. They are militarizing their borders and buying arms they cannot afford to try to protect themselves from Plan Colombia's fallout.

CLINTON'S QUAGMIRE

The president's seal of approval seals Colombia's fate

By Ana Carrigan

President Clinton is back from Colombia. His decision to waive conditions imposed by Congress on his \$1.3 billion Colombian aid package was an admission of the human rights disaster in Colombia and U.S. diplomatic bankruptcy. The Colombian government has failed to comply with six of the seven human rights criteria Congress demanded. Yet hundreds of millions of dollars will start flowing to the army anyway.

The waiver was necessary because, like every Colombian government since the '50s, President Andrés Pastrana's administration is unable to make its generals obey the Colombian constitution and disengage from their paramilitary allies. Nevertheless, as a White House official told an AP reporter recently, "You don't hold up the major objective to achieve the minor." The U.S. government's priority objective, explained Bryan Hittle of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, was to "get the aid flowing" to help Colombian authorities stop guerrilla violence that interferes with U.S.

Only Washington has the political clout with the Colombian military to insist that the generals cease fraternizing with assassins.

Ironically, for a politician as driven as Clinton to enhance the image of his presidency, Plan Colombia risks leaving a stain on his legacy and presents a poisoned chalice to his successor. Far from helping Colombia "strengthen its democracy," as Clinton claims, his policies have done the opposite. Military aid has strengthened guerrilla hardliners and convinced the elites they need not worry about the economic and social reforms necessary for peace. The Pentagon's alliance with an army that retains its links with paramilitary thugs has encouraged the expansion of the their alliance. While the U.S. Embassy cites statistics about the number of Colombian soldiers who have passed U.S.-sponsored "human rights" courses, Colombian civilians are being terrorized, driven into exile and slaughtered with impunity.

However appalling the methods of the FARC guerrillas, it is not left-wing terrorism, but the rapid rise in the political power of the extreme right and the military heft of the paramilitaries that now present the greatest risk to the elected Colombian government. Only Washington has the political clout with the Colombian military to insist that the generals cease fraternizing with assassins, order their forces to arrest paramilitary leaders and begin protecting civilians from their savagery. Alarming, Washington appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

According to recent reports in the media, the DEA offered to subsidize notorious paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño in return for his pledge to combat drug traffickers. This has renewed suspicions that, unbeknownst to the U.S. Congress and Colombian government, U.S. intelligence is involved in covert operations in Colombia's civil war. The story, as revealed by Castaño on national Colombian television in July, was confirmed the next day by an ex-DEA agent, who told the *Miami Herald* he acted as translator at meetings between U.S. operatives, Colombian narcos and members of Castaño's paramilitaries where U.S. government support for Castaño was discussed.

The Clinton administration claims the allegations are "a fantasy." Yet the State Department has refused to include Castaño's paramilitary group, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, on its official list of terrorist organizations; the Justice Department incomprehensibly has failed to demand Castaño's extradition, even after he publicly admitted five months ago that 70 percent of his funding comes from drugs. These disturbing facts have fueled Colombian fears that, as in Nicaragua and El Salvador a decade ago, the U.S. government has made a strategic counterinsurgency alliance with drug-trafficking killers to defeat the FARC. Colombians also say it is inconceivable the army would collude so blatantly with the paramilitaries without at least tacit U.S. approval. Their conviction has been reinforced by Clinton's signature on the human rights waiver.

After Clinton grafted military aid onto Plan Colombia, a coalition representing the 37 Colombian human rights and humanitarian organizations—the people whose collaboration is crucial for the Plan's development component—rejected any funding from the U.S. aid pack-

age. Citing "ethical and political difficulties in receiving aid from this program," they told Clinton his money was tainted. The NGO leaders, representing the spectrum of the Colombian peace movement, say his policies will wreck the peace process, escalate an unwinnable civil war and risk driving Colombian drugs, refugees and violence over Colombia's borders. They have asked European leaders, who will meet this month in Bogotá to finalize their response to Plan Colombia, to withhold their support and become actively involved in the urgent search for alternatives.

This is a message that needs to be heard loud and clear by both Gore and Bush. Their advisers should start paying attention to this major foreign policy crisis shaping up in the Southern Hemisphere. They need to listen to other Colombian voices—the burgeoning exile community would be a good place to start—and, in concert with regional and international allies and the active involvement of Colombian civil society leaders, begin the search for saner alternatives. There is still time—but barely—to protect the next administration from being dragged into a long-term, multi-billion-dollar quagmire and embroiled in an uncontrollable regional war. ■

Ana Carrigan reports regularly on Colombia for the Irish Times and is writing a new book of Colombian memoirs for Seven Stories Press.

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Tony Blair talks of citizen power but fears too much freedom

Britain's Big Brother

By G. Pascal Zachary

LONDON

This spring Britain sent ground troops to Sierra Leone to prevent a complete collapse of order in the West African country and to plant the seeds of a democratic revival. The Labor government of Prime Minister Tony Blair called this a "humanitarian intervention" designed to create a secure environment in which local democrats could rebuild essential institutions. Impressively, the action is working. With the help of British military specialists, democrats in Sierra Leone have hope for a better future.

If only democrats in Britain could say the same. The world's most famous monarchy, Britain lacks a constitution, a bill of rights and a tradition of judicial review of government actions. Meanwhile, no significant political or regulatory official is subject to direct election. Civic life is closely monitored, with as many as 1.5 million closed-circuit television cameras in operation. Many of these cameras film popular meeting places—so many, indeed, that civil liberties experts say that a visitor to central London is likely to be filmed 600 times in the course of a day.

Long one of the world's most centralized and restrictive democracies, Britain seemed to take a decisive turn toward expanding citizen power with Blair's election—a crushing defeat of the Conservative Party in 1997. In the wake of the election, Blair supporters enthused over the possibility of a "bottom-up" revolution in a country where, in the words of *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Freedland, "power flows from the top down. ... The government is in charge and the people are its servant."

Blair, whose party holds wide sway in Britain's Parliament, acts as if he wants to give the lie to what Freedland called the "profound fact" that "control over Britain and its institutions has never been handed over to the British people." Yet an expansion of local democracy in Britain is proving hard to realize. British journalist Andrew Marr has aptly described the prime minister as a conflicted leader, whose "impulse to reform and instinct to control" often are "in sharp and embarrassing conflict." Resolving this conflict is the challenge for Britain's reformers, and not a small one either.

Most distressingly, in August the Labor Party pushed through sweeping legislation that makes it a crime in Britain



CARLOS LOPEZ-BARRILAS/LIAISON

Britain's independent Channel Four used a sign with a pair of huge eyes to advertise a series on the country's pervasive public surveillance. There are as many as 1.5 million security cameras in stations, streets and shopping centers in England. Civil libertarians say that a visitor to central London is likely to be filmed 600 times in the course of a day.

to withhold computer passwords from government snoops. A computer user can even go to jail for five years simply for telling anyone that he or she has been served with such an order. Officially known as the Regulation of Investigatory Powers, the act allows the government to monitor all Internet traffic in Britain, including electronic mail, without a warrant or court order.

Defenders of the law say that it simply codifies what many governments, including the United States, already do: snoop electronically by every means at hand. Yet no government where rule-of-law holds expects ordinary citizens to become active agents in their surveillance (only Russia, Malaysia and Singapore impose similar requirements on computer users). Moreover, the law is the brainchild of a Blair government that constantly says it wants to empower citizens. As Roy Greenslade, another *Guardian* writer, points out: "This, remember, is the government that came to power crowing about its commitment to end secrecy. Instead its record has been a disgrace."

The new drive to centralize authority in the British state raises fresh doubts about Blair's commitment to expanding local democracy. To be sure, he has made good on his promise to give Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland their own regional assemblies. While these assemblies have far less power than, say, American states, they nevertheless provide a new forum for debates over government policy and push some government services closer to the people. The advent of these assemblies also has ignited debate about whether England, one of the four constituent "nations" of Britain, should have its own regional bodies. The old manufacturing area of Manchester and the chronically poorer northeast section of Britain are most enthusiastic about regional governance, backed by evidence that the central government in London invests too heavily in the already richer south and southeast parts of England.

But devolution has tried Blair's patience and exposed his autocratic leanings. He imposed a crony to oversee the Welsh assembly, only to face a revolt of his own Labor Party early this year. The new Labor chief in Wales is far less cozy with Blair than his predecessor. In Scotland, a Blair pal also rules the roost, and in Northern Ireland the assembly was suspended for a time because of Blair's failure to win concessions from Sinn Fein and the IRA.

London is the latest battleground over power-sharing. Blair created a new London mayoralty as part of his drive to expand local democracy. The election could have been a free-wheeling testimony to Blair's commitment to citizen power. Instead, it exposed his commitment to centralized power and fears over too much political freedom. To ensure that an ally won Labor's nomination for the post, Blair ditched his longstanding commitment to inner-party democracy, which had substituted one-person, one-vote elections for the closed-door deals that produced Labor candidates in the past.

Blair's hand-picked candidate, however, faced a challenge at the polls in May from insurgent candidate Ken Livingstone, who criticized Labor from the left. Livingstone trounced Blair's man in what looked like a thrilling victory for democratic forces. But the reality is that London's new mayor is essentially powerless. Any mayoral initiatives that involve spending money can be vetoed by Blair's deputy prime minister, John Prescott. While Livingstone has a visible platform with which to rally citizens (and criticize Blair further), he has few levers to deliver the goods.

The difficulties facing Livingstone are immense. An imaginative populist with a rare feeling for the British grassroots, he confronts a system so centralized and insulated from public scrutiny that it almost defies belief. Take one homely example, housing construction. In the United States, thousands of local planning boards decide whether to approve residential construction, relying on local standards that can vary tremendously. In Britain, a single standard holds sway for a nation of 60 million people, and one man is the final arbiter over all proposed homes. This housing czar is Prescott, who can say yea or nay on every single planning application for a new residential building in Britain. So sweeping are Prescott's powers that it would be as if Vice President Al Gore could decide that he didn't want a three-story home built in Palo Alto, California or a block of condos in New Orleans.

Prescott rarely exercises this right, but his power says much about why citizen participation seems so futile in Britain. Prescott, with the sweep of a hand, can trump local planners

and, of course, citizens groups. Even more astonishingly, grassroots activists can't usually challenge government planning decisions in the courts, so their resistance is severely limited. If citizens can't convince the elite bureaucrats under Prescott of the correctness of their views, they are doomed. After a few crushing losses at the hands of the British government, few protesters persist.

How can Livingstone—or any of the other insurgent reformers who will come to prominence in Britain's new era of "devolved power"—find ways to mobilize ordinary people on behalf of widening the civic space and deepening citizen participation in basic institutions? This is the big riddle of British politics today, and it is one that Blair seems unwilling to decipher. The prime minister repeatedly calls for a new spirit of pride and involvement among British citizens, yet his very actions undermine his message.

Under the tutelage of Anthony Giddens, the sociologist who runs the esteemed London School of Economics, Blair has tried to "modernize" Britain's social welfare state—battered and traumatized by Conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. In leading Labor to power—and in relentlessly trying to build the foundation to hold onto that power—Blair promotes a revived notion of solidarity based not on class (he recently declared the class war "over," to media raves), but around the ideal that citizens have both rights and obligations. He has said that if citizens assume their obligations, rights must follow. The question now is whether anyone believes him. ■

G. Pascal Zachary's new book, *The Global Me: New Cosmopolitans and the Competitive Edge*, is about multicultural identity, the future of nations and the new economy.



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WINONA SPEAKS

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE GREEN PARTY VP CANDIDATE

By Kristin Kolb-Angelbeck

While Al Gore and George W. Bush were coming down from their convention-infomercial highs, Ralph Nader and his running mate, Winona LaDuke, were barnstorming their way across the country and gaining the attention of independent-minded voters. On August 25, a Portland, Oregon rally for the Green Party ticket drew more than 10,000 people—larger than any public event for Bush or Gore this year.

Nader may be a familiar name. But who's Winona LaDuke? The 40-year-old economist, writer and mother of three is also a leading voice for American Indian rights. She lives with her family in White Earth, an Anishinaabeg reservation in northern Minnesota, where she heads the White Earth Land Recovery Project. LaDuke also co-chairs the Indigenous Women's Network and acts as program director for Honor the Earth, a national American Indian foundation.

Kristin Kolb-Angelbeck caught up with LaDuke before she left for Portland, during a pit-stop at her White Earth home.

What does your campaign offer to voters dissatisfied with Gore and Bush?

Ralph and I are saying: Let's cut to the quick of the dilemma we are facing in this society, which is the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few and the growing disenfranchisement of the vast majority of the American people. Al Gore never speaks to the issue of the disparity of wealth in this society. He never speaks to the issue of the growing corporate concentration of power, the increasing disenfranchisement of the working class in this country, or how hard it is to unionize.

Most job growth in the past few years has been in temp jobs and low-wage jobs. More people are working at places like Wal-Mart for minimum wage. All those people "happily" moving off welfare may be employed, but they

still are living at or below poverty level. Bush and Gore do not speak to these people.

What do you want to bring to the national political agenda?

First and foremost, we need to move the budget out of a military economy. A third of the federal budget is spent on the military right now—10 times what we spend on education. I have two children in school and one of them

had class in a trailer all last year. But instead of education, they spend money on new missile systems. We need to transform this military economy into a peacetime economy. That transformation would drive not only economic and social justice, but it would also do a lot for the environment. The military is the single largest toxic producer in the country.

We also need to talk about demilitarizing our foreign

policy. We're the single largest purveyor of small weapons in the world. Today most of the conflicts around the world are not fought with ICBMs or F-16s, they're fought with small guns—if that's what you want to call an M-16. During World War I, 95 percent of the people killed were combatants. Today 90 percent of people killed in wars are women and children. You do not sell guns to people who violate human rights, who are going to use those guns to mow down women and children. You don't give them guns with my tax dollars.

Do you think Bush would do more harm to your community than Gore?

Actually, Republican presidents have not been that bad for Indians. They've returned more land. Nixon was the best president for Indian people, isn't that interesting? He gave back more land and he supported more legislation benefiting Indian people than any other president of the past 30 years.



Winona LaDuke: economist, mother and aspiring vice president.

KIRK CONDYLIS/IMPACT VISUALS

Indians are suing the federal government for mismanagement of Indian funds. It's the largest class-action lawsuit in history. Now why do we have to sue them? Why couldn't they just say, "We're going to fix it." Meanwhile, the Republicans say they will tidy that up right away: It's on the Republican Indian platform.

What's on your Indian platform?

Oh, I've got a big Indian platform. Invest in an alternative energy policy. One of my big things is that the Great Plains is considered the "Saudi Arabia of wind power." We need heavy investment there. Plains tribes have all the potential in the world for wind energy, but they don't have any money. Meanwhile, 65 percent of research and development money in the Department of Energy over the past 40 years has gone to nuclear power and coal. Wouldn't it be great if we spent it researching and developing wind and solar power?

Also, set a living wage. Offer economic justice for poor communities. Create economic enterprise zones based on a localized model. Begin reconciliation and restitution programs similar to what [slave reparations advocate] Randall Robinson talks about. Basically, good countries should honor their treaties and good countries should not steal.

What are the biggest obstacles facing your campaign?

One is lack of access to the public forum, especially the debates, and the other is fear. The vast majority of the American electorate that is progressive bases their [political] decisions on fear, not on principle, and that's a shame. They're like, "Oh no, I can't vote for him, this might happen." We've got to get past that.

Is there really no difference for you between Gore and Bush?

I lost one of my best friends last year because of Al Gore. Her name was Ingrid Washinawatok, and she was killed in Colombia in March 1999. She went down there to help the U'wa [fight Occidental Petroleum's plans to drill on their ancestral land] and was assassinated by the FARC. Meanwhile, Gore has \$500,000 worth of Occidental stock and the U.S. government just gave \$1.3 billion in military aid to Colombia. They are the second largest recipient of U.S. military aid, and basically it's used to blow away civilians.

What Bill Clinton and Al Gore do is insidious. They let Occidental executives stay in the Lincoln Bedroom, and then they give military aid to Colombia to help support their little oil developments down there. I cannot support that man. I didn't even vote until 1996. If I didn't have Ralph to vote for, I wouldn't vote.

Why didn't you vote?

Because I just didn't believe in it. I wanted to vote for what I believe in. Also because of my circumstances—a lot of Indian people don't vote because they consider the United States a foreign government.

Do you think more American Indians are going to vote in this election?

Yes. We have the lowest voter turnout of any body. If I can convince another 5 to 10 percent to vote, I'll feel really great. Did you know there are

600,000 Indian voters in Oklahoma? And there are 60,000 in Montana. Indians would be a pivotal voting group if we would get out and vote.

What do you think of the media coverage of your campaign? All anybody really knows about you is that you're a Native American woman and you're running with Ralph Nader.

That illustrates how trivialized our campaign is. What do they say about Dick Cheney? They don't just say he's a rich white guy. In my case, I got a degree [in economics] from Harvard; I got a master's in world development from Antioch. I'm a rural economist by training. I wrote a couple of books. I wrote a novel [*Last Standing Woman*]. I have spent most of my life working on energy policy issues for different Indian communities who are being dammed or flooded or radiated or torn up for utilities in the East. I'm also the only candidate whose annual income is under six digits.

Looking at the protests against the WTO and the IMF, what do you see as a positive economic alternative to globalization?

Localization—investing in local economies. Remember the rise of the microbreweries a few years ago? We need to return to micro-cheeseries, small farms. We need to value local markets. The government needs to finance small businesses and stop corporate mergers. I lost track after AOL bought Time Warner. It's like a woman with 19 hyphenated last names. I have no idea who's who anymore. Keep your own names, ladies.

You can't just exist on your island of political correctness. You have to fight bad guys and make good. Strengthen your communities. And you've got to vote.

[Baby cries.]

I have three children. I have a six-month-old here that I'm nursing.

How do you juggle campaigning and being a mom?

Wildly. I always bring the baby with me when I'm travelling. I really had to trade in my family [to do this campaign]. So I try to demand family time as much as I can. I also realize that to ensure a good life for my kids, I have to retain my political activism.

To be honest with you, as a woman, campaigning strikes me as a male privilege. Guys can walk away from childcare. All those politicians have someone else take care of their kids. But I'd rather be with my kids than out shaking hands.

As a woman and a mother, how do you see yourself bringing a different perspective to politics?

I see the back end of all the laws the Washington guys write. Living in a poor community, as a woman and as a mother, I feel the absence of good education programming, of funding for daycare and health programs for kids. Every four years, I see these guys talking about what to do with women's bodies. But you don't hear them talking about the quality of women's lives in between campaigns.

I think I bring a much more holistic perspective. If you care about the quality of life for future generations, you better care about the quality of life for women and children. And that better mean clean air, clean water, good health care, good education. That's your future. Your future is not in how many guns you have. Your future is in the well-being of your kids. ■

THE LAST INDIAN FIGHTER SLADE GORTON IS AMERICAN INDIANS' PUBLIC ENEMY NO. 1

By Jeffrey St. Clair

For years, environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest have referred to Sen. Slade Gorton, the Republican from Washington, as "Senator Skeletor." But in Indian Country he's known as the "Custer of the Senate." And with reason. For the past 25 years, Gorton has been bashing Indians as relentlessly and ruthlessly as Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms have race-baited blacks.

Gorton's noxious rhetoric often turned out to be just that—rhetoric. For much of his career, he has lacked the influence to back up his overheated chest-pounding. But as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee's powerful sub-committee on Interior and Related Agencies (including the Bureau of Indian Affairs), Gorton is now in a position of tremendous power over the more than 550 federally recognized Indian tribes, fully capable of turning into legislation his perverse obsession with punishing some of the poorest people on the continent.

Since he became chairman in 1995, Gorton has moved against Native Americans on a myriad of fronts by attempting to slash federal support for Indian health care and schools, restrict salmon fishing rights, exert control over tribal housing developments and tax casino profits. In 1998, Gorton led the ultimately unsuccessful fight to strip Indian reservations of their sovereignty and institute means-testing for federal aid to tribes.

Tribes across the country are now fighting back, vowing to help defeat Gorton in November as he runs for his fourth Senate term. A tribal PAC has already begun running ads against Gorton throughout Washington, attacking the senator not only for his record on

Indians, but on the environment as well. "If you ask Indian leaders who is the enemy," says Ron Allen, a member of the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe of Washington and vice president of the National Congress of American Indians, "Gorton's would be the first name and the last name."

Back in the Reagan years, the vile James Watt, the Gipper's hapless Interior Secretary, grabbed headlines by denouncing Indian reservations as "the last bastion of Communism." Watt was rebuked for his impertinence and ridiculed by political pundits as a right-wing, born-again-Christian bigot. But over the past couple of decades, Watt's cause has been sedulously carried on by Gorton.

While the press savaged Watt, Gorton has been treated by the media as a more serious character, often described as "studious," "brilliant" and "mercurial." There are better descriptions of Gorton: cranky, peevisish, rueful, petulant and vindictive. "He has a brusque, prosecutorial manner and the demeanor of a coroner," says a long-time staffer for a Republican senator. "He likes to bully people, even fellow senators, into taking his side."

Part of Gorton's animus toward Indians appears to be personal. In the early '70s, the Lummi Nation won a landmark court case, known as the *Boldt* decision, giving tribes the rights to half of the steelhead and salmon returning to their spawning grounds in the Puget Sound basin. Gorton, then Washington State attorney general, was outraged by the decision and mounted two

appeals to the Supreme Court. He suffered stinging rebukes in both cases and has been on a vendetta ever since.



Washington Sen. Slade Gorton has emerged as a true Visigoth.

Gorton rode into the Senate in 1980 on the heels of the Reagan landslide, defeating old liberal warhorse Warren Magnuson. It was a nasty campaign, highlighted by Gorton's smearing Magnuson as being too enfeebled to be re-elected. Upon taking office, Gorton moved swiftly to settle his old scores with the tribes. In 1981, he introduced a bill that would have overturned Indian treaty rights to steelhead trout fisheries in Washington. Gorton's first term in the Senate was by all accounts uninspired, and in 1986 he lost his seat to Brock Adams, who enjoyed the support of Washington's growing environmental vote. Embittered, Gorton vowed revenge.

After working as a lobbyist for the Non-Indian Negotiating Group, a coalition of corporations and white landowners seeking to weaken the sovereignty of the tribes, Gorton was back on the political scene in 1998. Campaigning as a full-fledged right-winger, Gorton was narrowly elected again to the Senate. But it wasn't until 1994—after the two moderate, senior Republicans from the Northwest who held Gorton on a tight leash, Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, had left the Senate—that Gorton emerged from the shadows as a true Visigoth, nearly indistinguishable from Idaho's Larry Craig or that grim duo from Alaska, Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens.

The only groups to rank near Indians on Gorton's hate list are environmentalists. Upon his return to the Senate, Gorton, backed by timber industry cash, immediately went to work to unravel the Endangered Species Act (ESA). He pursued the task with such zealotry that it landed him under the scrutiny of the Senate Ethics Committee.

In 1995, Gorton introduced a bill that effectively would have dismantled the ESA. Public Citizen filed an ethics complaint against Gorton when it uncovered a memo to the senator from his chief environmental aide, Julie Kays, describing how lobbyists for two anti-ESA industry coalitions had written a draft of his bill. The two groups, the National ESA Reform Coalition and the Endangered Species Coordinating Council, are bankrolled by timber, mining, ranching and power concerns, including the Northwest Forestry Association, Chevron, Kaiser Aluminum and the Idaho Power Company. "The bill takes some getting used to," Kays

wrote. "However, I think that the coalitions did a tremendous job of adopting your ideas and putting them into the bill."

These very groups have invested heavily in Gorton's political career. The ESA Reform Coalition had given Gorton \$34,000 in campaign contributions. Joan Claybrook, president of Public Citizen, accused Gorton of violating Senate rules by "using corporate lobbyists as an extension of his Senate staff. ... The law is clear that the public's business must be done by people on the public payroll."

Gorton shrugged off the allegations of impropriety, telling the *New York Times* that he "was perfectly willing to get the free services of good lawyers." The coalition's lawyer, Robert Szabo, was similarly dismissive: "Senator Gorton laid out his thoughts to us, he asked our help, and we gave it to him."



Gorton has tried to slash federal support for Indian health care and schools.

Nonetheless, in an admission of just how thoroughly corrupt official Washington has become, the Senate Ethics Committee refused to reprimand Gorton, ruling that "such exchanges are common and acceptable practices."

Gorton has enjoyed a similarly cozy relationship with the fanatically anti-Indian Citizens Equal Rights Alliance, a coalition

of nearly 500 groups that is pushing to end the tribes' right to self-government on reservation lands. Despite its claim to be a human rights group, CERA's real interests become clear on a visit to its Web site (www.citizensalliance.org),

which is cluttered with references to the evils of "multiculturalism," the dangers of a global government administered by the United Nations, and

intimations that tribal governments "currently deny millions of people living on or near Indian reservations their full constitutional rights."

Among CERA's objectives, two stand out: to "ensure the right to own private property on or near Indian reservations" and to "ensure the fair administration of natural resources on public lands for the general welfare." Thus, it's not surprising that more than 50 percent of CERA's member organizations have an interest in mining, timber or oil and gas, and that the organization itself is closely affiliated with the anti-environmental Wise Use movement. These corporations and businesses want a return to the old days, with unfettered access to tribal lands, free from pesky environmental regulations or noisome requirements that they hire tribal workers.

Gorton's supporters want a return to the old days, with unfettered access to tribal lands, free from pesky environmental regulations.

Since the early '90s, CERA has worked closely with Gorton and his staff on a range of anti-Indian measures, most of them unsuccessful. A few examples: In 1991, Gorton went to bat for sport and commercial fishermen by introducing a bill that would reduce the tribe's take of salmon and steelhead. Later that year, he sought to block legislation giving tribal courts jurisdiction over reservation residents who are members of other tribes. In 1995, Gorton introduced a rider bill directing that any tribe be denied at least 50 percent of self-governance funds if they fail to accommodate non-Indian water claims on reservations. The measure, a kind of senatorial blackmail, was largely aimed at his old enemies, the Lummi.

In 1998, Gorton introduced CERA's dream bill, the cynically titled "American Indian Equal Justice Act." It was offered as a kind of political extortion: Surrender self-rule or lose millions in federal money. Gorton's bill, which passed the Senate but was rejected by the House, would have required all tribes to surrender their tribal sovereignty in order to receive federal funds and for all tribes getting federal money to be means-tested. Ada Deer, a member of the Menominee Tribe and former assistant secretary of Interior for Indian affairs, called the measure "termination by appropriation."

There's a deeply ingrained paranoid streak to Gorton's politics. This paranoia is evident in Gorton's description of Indian tribes as being an expansionist threat to white people in the West. Such fear-mongering hasn't been heard since the press frenzy after Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull whipped Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn. Earlier this year on the campaign trail, Gorton boasted of his efforts to "fiercely protect the rights of [the tribes'] non-Indian neighbors." He casts his efforts as a crusade to protect little people. But in reality Gorton's chief backers are big corporations that want to continue exploiting Indian resources: coal companies, aluminum factories, timber firms and factory fishing fleets.

Gorton tends to portray tribal governments as run by incompetent and power-hungry cabals that want to exert oppressive controls over white people and corporations. "I don't think Indians should be able to impose their will on non-Indians," Gorton has lamented.

He argues that tribal governments should surrender their immunity from civil lawsuits. To illustrate his point, Gorton repeatedly has invoked a 1994 traffic accident involving a Yakima tribal policewoman who ran a stoplight, leading to the death of teen-ager named Jered Gamache. Gorton said that tribal sovereignty prohibited Gamache's family from suing the tribal government in non-Indian courts. (It should



American Indians rally at the Capitol against funding cuts.

Such fear-mongering hasn't been heard
since the press frenzy after Crazy Horse and
Sitting Bull whipped Custer.

be noted that Gorton is an advocate of tort reform, limiting jury awards in such lawsuits in federal court.) Outrageously, Gorton even compared tribal police to the cops that tortured Haitian émigré Abner Louima. "What makes the case of Jered Gamache different from the case of Abner Louima?" Gorton proclaimed in 1997. "Tribal sovereign immunity."

Later, Gorton denied making the statement. But when the *Portland Oregonian* confronted him with the fact that it had appeared in a press release issued by his own office, Gorton sheepishly mumbled a half-apology. But what Gorton didn't say, and the press didn't report, was that although the Gamache family couldn't sue the tribal government, it could—and did—sue the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Gorton tends to portray the federal payments to the tribes as if it were a form of welfare. Of course, the so-called Tribal Priority Allocation isn't a handout. It's a treaty obligation, a payment for the millions of acres of tribal lands seized by whites and the federal government.

The senator also inveighs in moralistic tones against Indian gaming, a rallying cry of the Christian right. Gorton suggests that tribes with casinos are on their way to becoming as wealthy as multinational corporations. He argues that the tribes should be means-tested and that those making a profit should be stripped of their federal allocations. (Meanwhile, Gorton spends much of his time in the Senate defending the interests of Boeing, securing tax breaks and lavish defense contracts for this multibillion-dollar company.) Gorton's pious attacks on Indian gaming also overlook the fact that few of these operations are actually making much money (see "Rolling the Dice," page 17).

A self-described fiscal conservative who wants to abolish the IRS, Gorton also has piously suggested that tribes could more than recoup their federal payments by imposing property taxes on tribal members. Naturally, the senator thinks it's unfair that the tribes are able to levy sales taxes and other user fees on non-Indians. "When the

IMPACT VISUALS

tribes find a way to make a dollar," says Herbert Madzu Whitish, chairman of the Shoalwater Bay Tribe in Washington, "they always find a way to take that away."

Last year Gorton was able to sneak through a provision that allows the Bureau of Indian Affairs to reallocate \$70 million from the richest to the poorest tribes. Gorton said that the measure was intended to address "funding inequities," but tribal leaders charge that it's a back-door assault on the federal government's treaty obligations to pay tribes regardless of their financial condition. "They haven't done an analysis of who's rich and who's poor," says Wayne Shammel, an attorney for the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe in southern Oregon. "So how can they redistribute a substantial portion of our priority allocations based on someone's unilateral choice on which tribes are wealthy and which aren't?"

But this is just Gorton's first step. The senator also wants to force the tribes to begin opening up their financial books, using a divide-and-conquer strategy designed to pit the tribes against each other. "Tribal nations have kept up their end of the treaty agreements made with the United States," says Mark Anthony Rolo, a member of the Bad River Ojibway tribe of Wisconsin and editor of *The Circle*, an American Indian newspaper. "If there's deep distrust among Indian nations toward the federal government, it's because ill-informed politicians like Senator Gorton insist on dreaming up schemes to keep us down."

But Gorton finds himself on the defensive as he faces a tough re-election battle against his likely Democratic opponent, former congresswoman Maria Cantwell, who herself faces a challenge in the September primary from state insurance commissioner Deborah Senn.

The tribes are a large reason the Democrats may have a shot at toppling Gorton. In 1998 the tribes formed a PAC, called the First American Education Project, that began raising money for a media campaign aimed at toppling Gorton. The Project intends to buy nearly \$2 million worth of ads opposing the senator.

The first ads are now beginning to air in Washington. They won't directly address Indian issues, mainly because that might backfire on the tribes. Instead the initial ads target Gorton for his role in inserting language in a military spending bill that would have overturned a federal court injunction against a gigantic cyanide-heap-leach gold mine in northeastern Washington. The mine, owned by Battle Mountain Gold, has been opposed by both environmentalists and the Colville and Nez Perce tribes.

Of course, Gorton is a shrewd politician, and he has deftly exploited the tribes' ads to portray himself as a victim in order to drum up even more financial aid. Gorton's campaign coffers are now bloated with corporate cash. As of June 30, he has pocketed more than \$3.8 million, and that figure is likely to double before the election. By comparison, Cantwell has raised a little more than \$1.5 million and much of that has already been spent to boost her name recognition and fend off Senn.

Still, the tribes have let the senator know that he's in for a fight. "We want to make a statement that if you attack the tribes there will be consequences," says Allen of the National Congress of American Indians. "Now we're able to bite back." ■

Jeffrey St. Clair is the co-author (with Alexander Cockburn) of Al Gore: A User's Manual, just published by Verso.

ROLLING THE DICE TRIBES' POLITICAL GAMBLER DON'T ALWAYS PAY OFF

By Sheryl Fred

In August 1998, the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe had contributed \$220,000 to the Democrats and was holding expensive fundraisers at its \$1.4 million mansion in Washington. So far this year, by contrast, despite the upcoming presidential election, the same tribe has made just \$16,500 in contributions and has sold its luxurious Embassy Row property. "We're not a special interest group in D.C.," says Frank Cloutier, spokesman for the tribe. "We're a sovereign nation and should be treated as such."

The Saginaw Chippewa aren't alone in cutting back their political contributions. In 1997 and 1998, American Indians used ample gaming profits to contribute nearly

\$1.2 million in soft money to the two major parties and spent almost \$7 million on lobbying in Washington. But in the current election cycle, all tribes together have given just under \$770,000 to Democrats and Republicans—on par with what they gave in 1996. "When Indians give money to the politicians, they really don't get a lot of benefits back," says Ron Allen of the National Congress of American Indians. "The Indian agenda has not been effectively addressed from these contributions."

Making up just 1 percent of the population, American Indians are marginal political players. Gaming debates brought Native American tribes to the forefront in 1997, when a federal panel was investigating the social

and economic impact of gambling in a two-year, \$5 million study. In June 1999, the commission recommended, among other things, that states and Indian tribes put a temporary freeze on any further casino expansion.

Since that time, American Indian PACs have been "taking more of a back seat in Washington," says Holly Bailey, a spokeswoman at the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonprofit that tracks campaign finance data. With regulation of gambling largely left up to the states, tribal groups have been packing up shop and moving home—even though key Indian issues have yet to be addressed by politicians.

At first, American Indians were skeptical of becoming part of the political process at all—and with good reason. Hundreds of years of broken promises and marginalization by federal and state government did not bode well for building trusting relationships. And Indian Country still faces a host of problems: the lack of tribal sovereignty, the loss of land titles and water use rights as well as widespread illiteracy, alcoholism and poverty among many tribes. There was a brief time when American Indians reasoned that political spending might give them more leverage in these struggles. They were wrong.



President Clinton visits Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Since their bid to gain political clout through political contributions alone hasn't paid off, tribes are now exploring alternative (and often less costly) ways to pressure politicians. The Saginaw encourage elected officials to visit them at their Michigan reservation, rather than regularly sending representatives to Washington. On June 3, for example, Democratic Rep. Dale Kildee came to the reservation for a fundraiser. Kildee has sponsored many bills supporting Indian education improvements in his 12 terms as a Michigan representative, and the Saginaw hope to keep him on their side. The tribe is "looking to build long-lasting relationships with politicians who are sensitive to Native American issues," Cloutier says.

Other tribes have made reservation visits part of a larger goal of educating politicians and their constituencies about

American Indian issues. The National Congress of American Indians encourages tribes to form nonprofits to educate the public about candidates' Indian affairs records through PR, advertising and direct mail campaigns. In Washington State, Republican Sen. Slade Gorton faces the First American Education Project in his bid for re-election this fall. The nonprofit plans to run television ads alerting voters to Gorton's despicable Indian affairs record in his two decades in office. A parallel effort by the new Washington Indian PAC hopes to raise money for likely Democratic candidate Maria Cantwell to counter Gorton's war chest of nearly \$4 million (see "The Last Indian Fighter," page 14).

Yet on the whole, American Indians have failed to influence statewide races, owing mostly to the small amount of money they've pumped into the electoral process. Between 1990 and 1998, American Indians made \$8.8 million worth of contributions in state gubernatorial and legislative elections—a pittance compared to other state interests, according to Samantha Sanchez, co-director of the National Institute on Money in State Politics. Even in Alaska, where American Indians make up one-sixth of the population, their 1998 election contributions totaled just \$125,104—just 1.6 percent of the state's \$8 million in cam-

campaign dollars. "[American Indians] don't contribute enough money to really be active players in the money game," Sanchez says.

One notable exception is in California, where Indian tribes run lucrative gaming operations. Of the approximately \$8.8 million Indian tribes pumped into statewide politics across the country between 1990 and 1998, \$5.8 million was spent on the 1998 California

elections alone. To put this in perspective, Indian groups contributed only 2 percent of the \$300 million spent on California elections that year. But timing was key: Native Americans contributed \$2 million in the final week before the election—a crucial spending time for special-interest groups—outdoing even organized labor's \$1.6 million.

American Indians reasoned that political spending might give them more leverage in these struggles. They were wrong.

arms manufacturers. Perhaps the prototypical "bad weapon" for its cost to American soldiers was the jam-prone Vietnam-era M-16: Hardened grunts soon learned to rely on older firearms.)

Meanwhile, the General Accounting Office quarrels with the Pentagon over its propensity to mothball perfectly serviceable weapons such as the A-10 attack plane (which comparably outperformed the F-117 "Stealth" fighter in the Gulf War) or to give them away to allies, as it did in the '90s with some 3,900 heavy tanks and 500 ground-attack jets.

Behind the lethal Babbity of the Defentech sales patter is an array of old-school hawks and think tanks who provide intellectual cover for the arms market's expansion. Silverstein offers detailed portraits of key players such as Andrew Marshall of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment (ONA), the primary theorist of the Revolution in Military Affairs, a chipper yet ominous notion holding that "high-tech weaponry is transforming warfare."

Marshall's work lends legitimacy to the Pentagon's version of planned obsolescence, whereby research and development budgets bloat apace with the junking of complex weapons systems already in place. Meanwhile, industry lobbyists and conservative flacks work zealously to maintain Marshall's central position in Pentagon budgeting and planning. Most recently, Marshall has managed to keep the Clinton administration transfixed with his vision of "brilliant" warfare, the sort of "war by remote control" that turned out in Yugoslavia to be rather a dud. Naturally, funding has increased drastically for such endeavors, thanks in part to the greatly inflated threat assessments Marshall's ONA has produced regarding such controversial topics as Chinese military expenditures.

The runaway militarism of the post-Carter era has paid serious dividends for its most ruthless proponents, who can count on lush post-retirement positions with defense contractors, think tanks such as the Hudson Institute, or "consulting firms" with close Pentagon ties such as The Spectrum Group. The avatar of well-connected hawks, former General Haig, cashed in his

**The cardinal rule
of arms dealing is
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so it's not exactly
a vocation for
choir boys.**

many years of government service to become "a Beltway wheeler-dealer." After leaving the Reagan administration in virtual disgrace, Haig's dance card rarely went unfilled: His associations have included the Trilateral Commission, the Bretton Woods Commission, the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom, and the Unification Church, not to mention his own evidently profitable consultancy, Worldwide Associates, whose confidential client list includes several major defense contractors.

Silverstein spends two chapters meditating on another, darker American archetype—the paranoid and ruthless gun runner—who, as various retired intelligence sources tell it, is the key to

the success of a coup or any similar "wet work." The cardinal rule of arms dealing is "Fuck thy Neighbor," Silverstein writes, so it's not exactly a vocation for choir boys. No, it takes a certain barbed talent to excel at purchasing factory-fresh crates of Polish AK-47s and Russian munitions on behalf of rightist insurgents. It takes the qualities evinced by cranky ex-Nazis Ernst Werner Glatt and Gerhard Georg Mertins.

Glatt fought in the Nazi army as a teen, then built a business empire on the profits of his expertise: providing arms (preferably of Eastern-bloc manufacture) for U.S.-backed covert operations and obtaining Russian weaponry for the top-secret, "black-budgeted" Foreign Materiel Acquisition Program (FMA). (As retired General John Singlaub notes of Glatt: "He liked the idea of bribing Communist officials to sell us Communist weapons that could be used to kill Communists.") Despite his well-maintained obscurity, Glatt worked with many rightists familiar from Reagan-era military scandals, such as Barbara Studley and former General Robert Schweitzer of GeoMilTech Consultants, a company central to the *contra* arms flow that was also known as "God's Mighty Team."



Gleaners, by Nancy Parkinson Albrecht, a painting from *Union Images 2000*, an exhibit organized by the Chicago Federation of Labor, on display at the Chicago Cultural Center through October 15.

Mertins received the Third Reich's Knights' Cross and later founded Merex, a multinational arms concern that also did extensive business with U.S. military intelligence, the FMA, the Afghan *mujahedin* and the *contras*. Like so many other arms dealers, Mertins found lucrative "work" for retired officers from the U.S. military (one of whom recalled Mertens "always came back from the [Defense Intelligence Agency] with money to spread around") even while he maintained ties to prominent Nazis.

In the same way that ex-Nazis and ex-secretaries of state leave behind the wages of patriotism and hang out a shingle, so the "grunts" of postmodern warfare are fungible warriors, assets transferred from downsized militaries to bland-faced corporations interested in exploiting unusual opportunities in the Third World. American companies like Military Professional Resources Inc. and foreign counterparts like South Africa's Executive Outcomes or Israel's Levdan, have adapted well to the sort of security and containment services once indirectly provided by the major powers of the Cold War in such disputed territories as African oil fields.

A new wrinkle, well in tune with corporate outsourcing trends, is that they also work extensively with the Pentagon and United Nations, in both innocuous and classified capacities. Thus, while the CIA has always employed mercenaries for various covert actions, such current operations as billion-dollar Virginia firm DynCorp's extensive anti-drug actions in Latin America, or Florida company Betac's close association with the Pentagon's Special Operations Command, receive the sheen of corporate respectability and are beyond censure or investigation. And they're hiring. "There's always action somewhere," a mercenary informed Silverstein at the infamous *Soldier of Fortune* convention, having recently turned down "work" in Burma and Congo. "This stuff never ends."

The persistently lavish spending on bloated killing technologies, as Silverstein observes, obscures areas of real crisis in the U.S. military budget, including readiness, health care and living conditions. Yet by focusing his book on the solipsistic and capricious warriors

of the title, Silverstein develops the tone of a localized narrative, seeming to explain the post-Cold War arms race as a tale of atavistic personalities rather than colliding schools of national thought, much less the decay of more humanistic concerns.

For instance, other trends in American politics run parallel to postmodern militarism, notably the domestic race toward maximum incarceration, a phenomenon abetted in no small part by the lobbying of a burgeoning private corrections industry. It is inescapable that, just as plummeting crime rates have accompanied the privatization and acceleration of punitive justice against the underclass and those caught up in the drug war, nations like Brazil now chase the dark dreams of American defense contractors at the expense of civil liberties and, ultimately, the welfare of the swelling poor.

So if anything, Silverstein's book suffers from its brevity. For though he does a fine job in connecting all the dots between Republican think tanks,

naughty Nazis and enigmatic mercenary firms, one senses there are many more stories, regarding the Pentagon's "black budget," the vagaries of military intelligence and all the smug middle-aged players who have paid in other people's blood for their spacious, well-landscaped homes in northern Virginia.

As it stands, despite the author's best efforts—what his book ultimately asks is whether Americans really desire this political life, Reagan-era blood and iron all over again forever—this well-executed volume resembles a half-measure, at least relative to the bland monolith it grapples with, the perpetual secret government, Al Haig and Andy Marshall and God's Mighty Team. We're the machine, they whisper in rejoinder, across our insensate domestic landscape of rolled SUVs and frozen cell phones and pulped Tom Clancy potboilers, we're the organized dream. ■

Mike Newirth is a Chicago-based writer whose work is forthcoming in *The Baffler* and the *Sarabande* anthology *A Fine Excess*.

Girlfriend in a Coma

By A.S. Hamrah

If you've ever wondered why some TV commercial for pants or a car looks like the work of a great European director or resembles the kind of art found on *Artforum* covers, the answer is that it was directed by a guy like Tarsem Singh.

Singh, the first-time feature director of *The Cell*, a slasher film starring Jennifer Lopez, directed the folk-art-

The Cell
Directed by Tarsem Singh

meets-Fra-Angelico fantasia that is R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" video, but he's made a career out of helming spots for auto manufacturers and the bottlers of mineral water. It's no surprise, then, that he has turned what at some point was probably an interesting plot conceit (Lopez is a social worker who has a talent for getting into the heads of schizophrenic children) into a machine

that shakes paint cans until their lids fly off in explosions of allusion and reference. It's unclear whether Singh wants the audience to know that he has swiped his images from every major visual artist of the past 10 years and several European directors going back to at least Andrei Tarkovsky. But regardless of his intentions, with *The Cell* he has delivered a magenta orgy so derivative that you wonder how he can live with himself.

Hollywood has co-opted images from the world of high art since before Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris*. But in the past when, say, Alfred Hitchcock wanted extra surreal gloss in the dream sequence of *Spellbound*, he went to the trouble of hiring Salvador Dali to design the sets. Similarly, the highbrow art-collecting director Albert Lewin was happy to throw a bone to artist Ivan Albright when he needed a portrait for his 1945 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Singh doesn't consider himself to be under the same obligation. In *The Cell*

we view scenes lifted from the coffee table books of a long list of contemporary art stars, right up to Damien Hirst, but none of it is the real deal. The artists have been disintermediated, as they say in management-speak, and replaced with (as a look at the film's credits reveals) about 12 different digital effects companies and a horde of production design minions so vast there are probably more of them than all the people who saw the Whitney Biennial this year combined. If Singh proves anything in *The Cell*, it's that homage is easier when the pesky artist in question isn't getting in the way by offering a vision that competes with the director's.

Naturally, Singh doesn't bother copping the work of artists who haven't been discovered yet. Not that that makes a big difference: Most cineplex-goers aren't going to know who his sources are anyway. Nonetheless, the fact that they're well-known in their milieu makes Singh's use of them either a dumb form of honesty or a cry for help. Once Lopez is magically inserted into the brain of the film's Lon Chaney Jr.-esque comatose psycho (Vincent D'Onofrio), she's subjected to dead tableaux vivants based on the work of everyone from Joel-Peter Witkin to Cindy Sherman, from Matthew Barney to Pierre et Gilles, from Francis Bacon to Henry Darger.

You picture Singh in a production meeting asking the art department: "How can we make the giant perverted freak scene look more like Joel-Peter Witkin? That's pretty kitschy, but is it possible to make the redemption a little more, you know, Pierre et Gilles? These Renaissance paintings are bloody, sure, but can you guys show me something really *out there*?" Singh gives the impression, with his joyless parade of actresses playing dead women turned into (by now old hat) baby-doll art, that for him the real-corpse sculpture of Max Aguilera-Hellweg just wasn't real enough.



Vincent D'Onofrio and Jennifer Lopez suffer for art in *The Cell*.

Needless to say, this is not the kind of question gore pioneers like Herschell Gordon Lewis and Ruggero Deodato asked themselves in the days of *Blood Feast* and *Cannibal Holocaust*. A catalog of '90s art history isn't enough to make a movie, so Singh mines art and horror cinema just as thoroughly, venturing into territory new to mainstream American features that star big names like Lopez. *The Cell* looks like the work of a sniffy art student who has seen some of the kinkier films French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet directed, but you don't have to dig that deep to call Singh on his borrowings. *The Cell* takes stop-motion gimmicks from the jerky animations of arthouse faves like Jan Svankmajer and the Brothers Quay, and in addition to Tarkovsky, Singh traverses the Caucasus to pick and choose from within the films of Sergei Paradjanov. Even in a moment of repose, Singh has to trowel on another reference. When Lopez kicks back at home with a fatty,

she pops Rene Laloux's 1973 French animation *Fantastic Planet* into her VCR.

Hey, Singh's just using the grammar that those who came before him invented or enlarged, right? So what if his budget was about a hundred times greater than all the money Paradjanov ever had to work with his whole life? The difference is that while the Soviet authorities forced Paradjanov to stop, Singh simply doesn't know when to stop. That freedom of choice has produced *The Cell*, and it has pushed the slasher film into a decadent phase so overstuffed that it just popped like a head in David Cronenberg's *Scanners*.

Unpleasant? Is hunting down a serial killer ever pleasant? Colorful? Rich in color, bristling with texture, overly concerned with different kinds of fabric. Artistic? Very artistic. In fact, it's unlikely that anything as artistic as *The Cell* has ever been produced before. Short-form works like the videos of Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson come close, but they're just not ambi-

tious enough. In fact, just to be safe, Singh has absorbed them, too. No one has ever worked so hard to stroke the body-art crowd as Tarsem Singh. He makes the best dominatrix look like a lazy manicurist who gets all her ideas from *Family Circle*.

Along with Lopez and D'Onofrio, Singh has assembled a high-powered cast of capable actors who've made their marks in more thoughtful films. Vince Vaughn, Dylan Baker, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Pruitt Taylor Vince and Patrick Bauchau have been plucked like apples from the top branches of better orchards, all to help Singh visualize the goings-on inside a crazy (but gosh—ultimately sympathetic) killer's head. They're uniformly good; it's in the acting that Singh shows he can direct a film, and if he hasn't put anything but claptrap on the screen, he has instilled a weird awe in the minds of his actors. "I did [*The Cell*] because of Tarsem's visuals," Vaughn told the *Boston Phoenix*.

"It's like a \$45 million art-house film. The script to me didn't make a lot of sense. But when I met Tarsem, he was so passionate about his vision. I think it's really cool what he did."

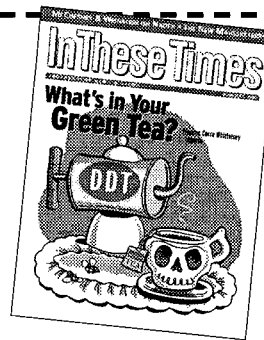
D'Onofrio, after noting that there have already been enough serial killer movies, added that for him "the trick was Tarsem. He suckered me into it. He's just so committed, and not in this Tarantino way where he's crazy and manic and you never understand what he's saying. He knows exactly what he wants. If it's possible to be original these days, he gets very, very close to it. So I couldn't say no."

These comments will be a mite confusing to anyone who has seen *The Cell*, but fortunately they're a little hilarious, too. Insulting Tarantino—whose *Jackie Brown* is a work of profound maturity and great breadth compared to Singh's film—for being passionate, just to prop up a smooth-talking director whose vision comes out of a trunk full of museum slides, reveals enough doublethink to keep the careers of 10 agents humming along on cruise control; describing Singh's secondhand vision as the zenith of Hollywood originality tells us more about where we are today than any scumbled touch you can find in the full two hours of *The Cell*. At one point in the interview, D'Onofrio blurted: "It's a fuck-ing movie, for Christ's sake." If only it were. It's more of a lemon jello mold that has been stuffed full of mushrooms, gum drops and cuff links.

Singh is so impressed by the conceits of his tony exploitation film about dead women in handmade dog collars that he doesn't even bother to include a shot featuring the famous Lopez posterior. His conviction in that regard qualifies his film as art, even without all the pretentious trappings. Conviction like that you don't find every day, especially in filmmakers used to directing Volkswagens. There are films with more modest aims (even *Schindler's List* had more modest aims) currently playing around—pleasant films, films that take few risks, films afraid to slice a horse into sections, films that don't know Joel-Peter Witkin from Joel Chandler Harris—but those films don't have pink trees in them. ■

A.S. Hamrah is the co-editor of *Hermenaut* magazine and a frequent contributor to *Suck.com*.

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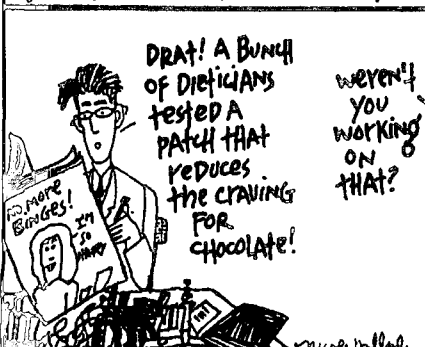
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By Nicole Hollander

"MY PATCH REDUCED THE CRAVING FOR GUMMI BEARS," SAID CLYDE, SINKING INTO A BLACK PIT OF DEPRESSION. "SNAP OUT OF IT, CLYDE," I SHRIEKED, "AND GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL SIDE. DEVELOP A PATCH TO REDUCE DEPENDENCE ON THE AUTOMOBILE AND ONE THAT STOPS US WANTING STUFF WE CAN'T HAVE." "NO ONE WANTS TO QUIT DRIVING, AND WE CAN'T FORCE THEM." "MORE'S THE PITY," I SAID. "WHAT ABOUT A PATCH THAT CURBS THE IMPULSE TO GIVE THE OTHER GUY A BREAK?" "YES! I BELIEVE YOU'RE ON TO SOMETHING," CLYDE SAID, GIVING ME A TWIRL AND SKIPPING BACK TO THE LAB.



Mayer Vishner, a member of the overground support group: "The script oversimplifies the treachery of Cointelpro." The late folk singer Phil Ochs' brother, Michael: "A flyer has more depth."

On the other hand, Stew Albert likes *Steal This Movie*—odd, because I have always thought of him as a stoned Talmudic scholar, serving as a source of objectivity and keen insight. "It's true to Abbie's spirit," he says, "his unwillingness to accept the world the way it was given to him."

Stew's wife, Judy Gumbo, likes the movie, too. "It's seamless," she says, "the way it shows how Abbie brought political theater to American demonstrations."

It's as if Stew and Judy, because they want so much for *Steal This Movie* to succeed, have superimposed a halo over it. But Stew insists: "I have seen this movie in four different cities and seen the reaction of hundreds of young people. Because of this movie, Abbie and the Yippies will become known to a whole new generation."

Other old friends of Abbie—Ron Kovic, Bobby Seale and Ellen Maslow—like the movie, too. "Ellen likes it because her three sons saw it and now have a much better understanding of what their mother was about," Stew says. "I think I would like the movie just for this reason alone. I certainly did not find it boring."

Fair enough, but the halo-effect metaphor definitely applies to attorney Gerry Lefcourt, who not only figures prominently in the movie, but is also an associate producer. He is shown on the screen defending Abbie in the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, even though he didn't (he handled pretrial motions). In a radio interview, when it was implied that he was there, rather than deny it Lefcourt simply mentioned how many times he had defended Abbie. He is apparently unembarrassed that William Kunstler and Lenny Weinglass—who actually were the defense attorneys at the conspiracy trial—are not even mentioned. Even worse, two of the defendants aren't in the movie. At a screening, I whispered, "Hey, it's the Chicago Five."

Upon leaving the theater, I avoided producer-director Robert Greenwald—with whom I've had a cordial relationship—in the corridor. If he had asked me what I thought, I would have answered, "It made me cry." Which was true, only I had cried not because the film was inspiring, but because it was a waste. Greenwald obviously started out with idealistic intentions, but he remains responsible for a production that is unrelentingly void of character development and plot structure. The editing is choppy as cole slaw, and the screenplay lacks any semblance of originality. The whole film reeks of misinformation.

Abbie shouts Martin Luther King's words as if they were his own—"Free at last, great God Almighty, free at last!"—and Jerry Rubin shouts Lenny Bruce's words as if they were his own—"In the Halls of Justice, the only justice is in the halls!"

There's a lot of shouting in this movie, perhaps to drown out the lies—such as the lie that Abbie's son, America, didn't know that Abbie was his father while he was on the lam.

I had really hoped to like *Steal This Movie* better on my second viewing, but it was worse, not only because it does an injustice to a fighter for justice. It's also a terrible movie. There may be those who will appreciate the movie's anti-war message, the lack of hippie-bashing and Abbie's looking-directly-into-the-camera encouragement to protest



DAVID MILNE

The Man can't bust our mythology: the new, improved Abbie.

creatively. They will enjoy the courtroom antics of Abbie and Jerry, wearing black judges' robes and, when ordered to remove them, wearing Chicago Police Department uniforms underneath. One young moviegoer told me, "I admit to knowing next to nothing about Abbie Hoffman, but his life is so unique that the movie held my attention."

Greenwald originally wanted Robert Downey Jr. to play Abbie. At first Downey accepted the role, but he demanded that Abbie's drug arrest be shot with actual cocaine. So instead, Vincent D'Onofrio (also the executive producer) got the part. He's a half-foot taller than Abbie, and his imitation Bahston/New Yawk accent sounds like an unfortunate speech defect. Worse still, the Abbie that D'Onofrio portrays is the Phantom of the Media, an out-of-context, one-dimensional rabble-rouser, spouting slogans and hackneyed rhetoric.

The movie is an unsuitable hodgepodge of attempted reenactments of Abbie's Greatest Hits—throwing money at the New York Stock Exchange, levitating the Pentagon, protesting at the Democratic Convention, the Chicago conspiracy trial, saving the Saint Lawrence River—interspersed with Abbie's marriage and lots of clips from stock news footage to remind us of flower children, police riots and political assassinations. It's presented in flashbacks, but unlike *Citizen Kane*, Abbie is alive when it begins and alive when it ends. Yes, it's a happy romantic ending for a tragic unromantic reality. The audience only learns from a where-are-they-now subtitle in the closing credits that Abbie committed suicide in 1989.

Abbie once told me that a group of filmmakers wanted to follow him around in order to produce a documentary, but he declined. I asked him why. He smiled and replied, "I wanna make my own myth."

Here, we're presented with Greenwald's limited vision of Abbie's myth. He happened to find a copy of *To America With Love: Letters From the Underground*—a poignant collection of correspondence Abbie exchanged with his second wife, Anita, while he was a fugitive ducking 15-years-to-life for a drug bust. Anita gave me an inscribed copy; Abbie wrote his inscription on a yellow post-it and mailed it so that I could put it next to Anita's inscription. Anyway, a few years ago, Greenwald optioned the book, plus *Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel* by Marty Jezer.

Anita is portrayed by Janeane Garafolo, who sought out the part. The movie was made while Anita—who appears briefly in a courtroom scene—was dying from cancer. She had two movies in her mind at the time. In her latter years, she had become intrigued by the twin towers of mysticism and conspiracy. She read books and magazine articles about those subjects, and listened to Art Bell's late-night radio show. She believed there was life on other planets and accepted the notion of certain UFO aficionados that extraterrestrials have been making a movie of the earth's progress. "I hope I remember to ask to see that movie," she told me.

"Somehow, Abbie will see the movie," she said, referring this time to *Steal This Movie*. She felt ambivalent about it. "When I mentioned the paucity of other characters, Robert [Greenwald] replied that on a low-budget film we just can't afford a lot of major players. This is Hollywood."

On her deathbed, she told the Leffs that she thought *Steal This Movie* was "mediocre," yet her greatest regret was not living to attend the opening. I chose not to ask, "Well, if Abbie can see it from the afterlife, why can't you?"

Abbie would undoubtedly relish the paradoxical symbolism of the movie opening with Jimi Hendrix's gut-twisting version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," since that same song now serves as background music in a TV commercial for Pop-Tarts. He would fume at the minimized and distorted portrayal of his third wife, Johanna Lawrenson, who had been his running mate while on the lam. She was his main co-conspirator after he emerged from six years of hiding.

Al Giordano, a friend of Abbie and Johanna, now editor of the online *Narco News*, complains that *Steal This Movie* erases Johanna from the '80s, "from the CIA-on-campus trial, for example, where she did half the work." A speech that Abbie gave at Vanderbilt University in real life has been morphed into his summation at that trial in the movie version. In real life, Johanna was in court; in the movie, Anita is. Because Johanna refused to participate in the movie, Greenwald's assistant told Giordano: "Well, if Johanna won't talk to us, we'll just eliminate the years that Abbie spent underground from the movie. We don't need the facts of the underground story to make this movie."

So we get the unfactual appearance of Abbie at the "Bring Abbie Home" rally (two years earlier he did show up, in a manic stage of his clinical manic-depression, at a memorial for Phil Ochs). And the unfactual underground scene where Abbie and young America urinate together outdoors in an

attempted act of scatological male bonding reminiscent of Adam Sandler's similar star turn in *Big Daddy*.

Lest you conclude that this pissar of a scene was plagiarized, *Steal This Movie* was basically in the can long before *Big Daddy* was released; Greenwald just couldn't find a distributor. Then came the WTO protests in Seattle, and suddenly *Steal This Movie* was considered a bankable project. So now it's officially a Lions Gate Film. Those protesters could not have foreseen such ironic fallout from their demonstrations. Completing the circle, *Steal This Movie* was even screened in Seattle as a benefit for the Community Action Network, which had been so involved in organizing the WTO protests.

Greenwald orchestrated a shrewd marketing plan by staging such prescreenings in various cities as benefits for progressive organizations—Refuse & Resist, Planned Parenthood, the ACLU, the National Lawyers Guild, the Green Party, Pacifica's KPFF—and scheduling its opening on the day after the Democratic Convention. But the question remains, will word-of-mouth help or hurt ticket sales? Buzz is a two-way street. At one point in *Steal This Movie*, Abbie shouts, "Dull is deadly!" That maxim applies to the movie itself. Ebert and Roeper may have given it two thumbs up, but Abbie would definitely give it two middle fingers. ■

Paul Krassner is the author of *Sex, Drugs and the Twinkie Murders: 40 Years of Countercultural Journalism*, just published by Loompanics; his CD, *Campaign in the Ass*, also has just been released by Loompanics. For a free copy of his newsletter, *The Realist*, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Box 1230, Venice CA 90294.

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STEAL THIS REVIEW

By Paul Krassner

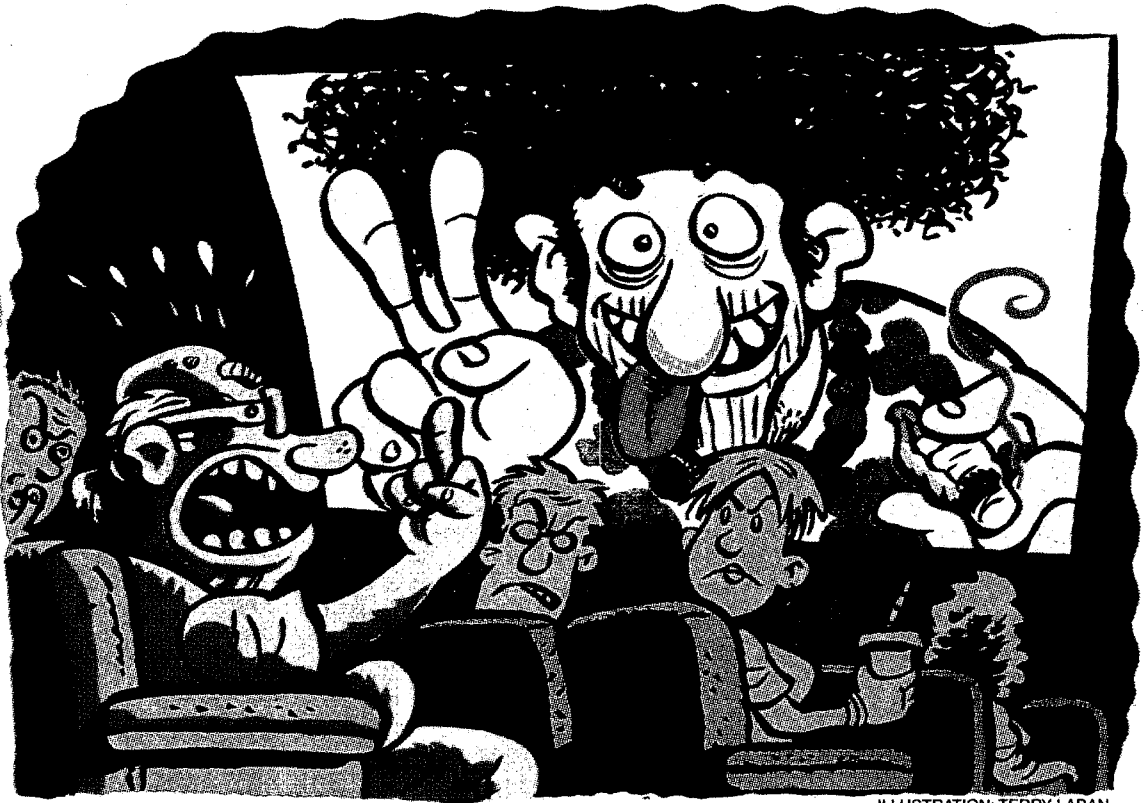


ILLUSTRATION: TERRY LABAN

There's a scene in *Steal This Movie*—a film biography of Abbie Hoffman—where the actors playing Abbie and fellow activist Stew Albert are being roughed up by the police. They had to do several takes. The actor playing Stew kept getting thrown over a table, again and again—this was not a stunt man, but the actor himself—and Stew, who was on the set, thought, "In the '60s we got it right the first time—the cops hit me, and I went down."

During a break, the actor came over to Stew and asked if his line—"Get out of here, you fucking fascists!"—was something Stew would have said. Stew replied, "No, it's too abstract.

They just roughed me up. I would have called them 'fucking pigs.'" The actor changed his line, and it's in the movie.

The title is a take-off on Abbie's *Steal This Book*, but it should be called *Forgive This Movie*, because it's absolutely awful. I say that, having been a close friend of Abbie as well as a co-founder of the Yippies (Youth International Party). Others in the Yippie community feel the same way. Sam and Walli Leff, the cornerstone of Abbie's overground support group: "The movie is boring, and Abbie may have been a lot of things, but he was never boring." Bob Fass, WBAI's pioneer of free-form radio: "It's just not funny, and Abbie had the sharpest sense of humor since Lenny Bruce."

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